

# ***“Soul Exchange?”***

**MARK 8:34-38**

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Most of us here this morning love getting a good deal on something. Especially when it comes to making a rather large purchase, we normally shop around, we do some research, and we might even do a little bit of price matching. Last week I got 15 more bags of mulch from Home Depot. The official price was \$2.75 per bag, Menards had the same thing for \$1.98 per bag, but Home Depot was closer, so all I had to do was tell the cashier, and she matched the price. Of course, there was a guy right behind me with his own huge pile of mulch, he heard what I was saying to the cashier, so he did the same thing! We love getting a good deal when it comes to buying a car, or appliances, or even a house. Most of you know that I love Goodwill. I love that everything I buy at Goodwill is already pre-shrunk. If I try it on and it fits, it is guaranteed to fit when I get home!

When we get a good deal on something, we are basically making an exchange. We are trading money (which is valuable) for something that we consider is more valuable (or at least equally valuable). Sometimes we are forced to make what we consider to be a bad deal. If we pull up to a gas station with an empty tank and the price has gone up 25 cents per gallon overnight, we don't have much of a choice; however, we usually make the decision that paying 25 more cents per gallon is better than walking, we might not be happy about it, but we do it anyway. We have made an exchange – we trade something of value for something else that also has value to us.

Sometimes, of course, what is valuable to me might not be of much value to you, and vice versa. A while back, I told you about something that happened to me at camp almost 20 years ago now. I was down at the river supervising some campers in the water when one of the kids came up to me with a look of shock on her face, and she said, “You are wearing your Girbaud’s in the water?” I had no idea what that young woman was talking about, but apparently I was wearing some very expensive designer jeans! To me, those jeans were a good deal at the thrift store, they fit well, they felt good, and so I decided that they would be my river pants. To her, though, those were \$80 jeans that should never be worn in the mud. Late last week, by the way, I looked up the Girbaud Company on the Internet so that I could spell it correctly for this lesson, and apparently they filed for the French version of bankruptcy sometime last summer. To me, it is amazing how the latest fads can come and go so quickly. But the point is: Our perspective and experience in life can often lead us to different conclusions concerning the value of something.

We think about something as simple as a glass of ice-cold water. If I had a glass of ice water up here, and if you had a \$100 bill, I doubt you would make that trade. However, what if you had been walking through the desert for three days with no water, and what if I were to appear before you with that glass of water. The circumstance has changed, and perhaps we might be willing to make that deal. We think of Aron Ralston, the young man who went hiking in the wilderness of southeast Utah who found himself exploring a narrow canyon when he was suddenly pinned by a giant boulder that had shifted onto his arm. Under normal circumstances, none of us would ever consider amputating our own arm, but after several days with no hope of ever being found, Aron made that choice. The circumstances had changed, and what was once unthinkable had suddenly become the only rational course of action.

What about those things that are most important to us? Have you ever taken a moment to think about your most valuable possession? For me, I might think about our children's baby books – those books that are full of pictures and records. Maybe you have some valuable possession passed down from your parents or grandparents. What would we accept in exchange for those valuable items? Or maybe something less tangible like our health. If we are sick, what might we be willing to give up to be healthy again? If we are well, and if it were possible, is there anything we want so badly that we would give up our health to obtain? If someone offered me a million dollars, would I be willing to go around being dizzy all the time? For most of us, that would be a foolish trade, because it would keep us from enjoying life, as we should.

Most of you can probably see where we are going with this, because in the Bible, Jesus does raise the question of making an exchange for what is truly our most valuable possession. The question is raised in Mark 8:34-38 (p. 1574). As careful as we are to make sure we are getting a good deal with our clothing, and cars, and homes, and as much as we might value and protect our lives and our most treasured possessions, it is amazing how shortsighted we can be when it comes to the issue the Lord discusses in Mark 8. And to teach a very important lesson, the Lord appeals to our sense of profit and loss, he appeals to our sense of economy. The Lord uses this picture to make a point, a picture that all of us today can understand. With this in mind, let us please look together at Mark 8:34-38,

***<sup>34</sup> And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. <sup>35</sup> For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? <sup>38</sup> For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."***

As we look at these verses, I would like for us to focus in on the Lord's questions in verses 36-37, ***"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*** And as we look at these basic questions, I would like for us to consider, first of all, the value of a soul. And then I would like for us to consider the exchange that is often made, the exchange that the Lord is warning about here.

**I. But first of all, let us please think for just a few moments about THE VALUE OF A SOUL.**

Based on what the Bible says, how do we assess the value of a human soul? After all, if we are considering an exchange, we need to come to a proper understanding of what a soul is actually worth. What makes a soul valuable?

**A. First of all, I would suggest that a soul is valuable because of its creator.**

We can go to Wal-Mart and pick out an outfit for maybe \$30 or so, but then we see on the news that some outfit being modeled in Italy is worth thousands of dollars. The difference between those two outfits is often the designer. The two outfits might even look fairly similar to the untrained eye, but the clothing created by the famous designer is worth far more. In the same way, consider the designer and creator of the human soul. In Genesis 1:26, God said, ***“Let us make man in Our image...”*** We learn, then, that we have been designed and created by God, and because of this, our souls are valuable.

**B. We could also say that our souls are valuable because each soul will live forever.**

We might say that a human soul is a good investment because of its durability. When we go shopping for something, especially for a large purchase, we usually compare several brands, and as we compare we are often comparing reliability. We want a refrigerator that will last for many years. We want a car that will make it to 200,000 miles and beyond. And when we are faced with a cheaper product that will not last as long and a slightly more expensive product that will last much longer, we will often decide to spend more to get the product that will last the longest. And the reason is, the longer lasting product is often the result of better planning, better design, better materials, and better workmanship. In a similar way, the human soul will last forever and we should therefore invest more of our time and energy in our souls than we do in anything else. Our physical bodies will grow old and die, but the soul will live on after death. Death, after all, is simply the point when the soul leaves the body. King Solomon spoke of death in Ecclesiastes 12:7 when he said, ***“...the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”*** The bodies we have are just a shell. If we can see it, it will not last. The soul, though, is described in the Bible as being ***“eternal.”*** The soul is what really matters. The soul is the only part of us that will live forever. The soul, then, is valuable because of its durability.

**C. In the scriptures, we also find that the soul is valuable because of the price that was paid for each one.**

Here in this nation, most of us still believe in the principle of supply and demand. If there is no desire or demand for a particular item, then the item has no value. However, the human soul is valuable because each soul is desired or loved by God. Each and every soul on this earth is in demand. We think of 1 Peter 1:18-19, where Peter tells us to live in the fear of God, ***“...knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”*** God loves us so much that he purchased our souls with the blood of his only Son. We think of what Paul said to the elders from Ephesus in Acts 20:28, where he said, ***“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*** Our souls are valuable because of the price that has been paid.

We may not be able to go to an appraiser and get an exact figure, we may never sell our souls on e-bay (as some have tried to do), but in a spiritual sense our souls are extremely valuable. We have been made by God, our souls will last forever, and God has already paid the ultimate price for our salvation.

II. **With all of this in mind, though, this morning we have been talking about making some kind of EXCHANGE, “WHAT WILL A MAN GIVE IN EXCHANGE FOR HIS SOUL?” So if we know the soul’s value, WHAT MIGHT WE TRADE FOR IT?**

In some ways, this is a little like asking a little kid which is worth more, a dime or a nickel. Well, a nickel is obviously larger than a dime, so the nickel must be worth more. The same goes for the difference between a dime and a penny. The penny is larger, so it must be worth more. And then we have the choice between a quarter and a dollar bill. The dollar is just made out of paper, and something shiny is obviously better than paper, so the quarter is clearly worth more. Of course, those of you who have a younger sibling know all of this very well. It was so fun making little trades until they finally figured it out! When we make a trade, then, it is important to know what we are trading. And it is a trade – it is impossible to have both. We remember how the Lord referred (in verse 37) to making an *“exchange.”* *“What will a man give in exchange for his soul?”* And in verse 36, *“For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?”* There is a *“gain”* and a *“forfeit”* involved. We gain something and we give up something else. So, with this in mind, what are the options? What does this world really have to offer? What kind of deal are we getting when we invest in this world? What might we be tempted to trade for our souls?

A. **Certainly some might be tempted to make a straight out swap for money or stuff.**

We think of Achan (in Joshua 7) who traded his soul for some silver and gold and a piece of clothing. We think of King Ahab who traded his soul for a vineyard of grapes. We think of Judas who had it all (spiritually speaking), and yet he traded his soul for 30 pieces of silver. In the end, money and even great riches will fail to bring us any real and lasting pleasure. We think of the richest man who ever lived. In Ecclesiastes 5:10, King Solomon said, *“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity.”* The Lord himself put things in perspective in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:19-21, *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

Several weeks ago, I talked to brother Clint and asked for some advice on investing for retirement, and he pointed out that stocks seem to be overvalued right now. In other words, as I understand it, stocks are currently selling for much more than they are actually worth. I will take his word on that, but there seems to be a spiritual application here, and that is: When it comes to making a spiritual investment, the world is overvalued right now. In other words, the world is selling for much more than it is actually worth. The asking price is too high. When it comes to exchanging our souls for this world, the price is not worth it. The world is not a good investment.

In practical terms, this means that we need to remind ourselves that our souls are more important than anything this world has to offer. As parents, we have a responsibility to teach our children that neither their work nor their education is more important than being with God’s people and studying God’s word. When we allow our children to stay home to study, we are making a terrible mistake; we have miscalculated the value of a soul as compared to the value of this world. We have told our kids from the beginning: The purpose of going to public schools is to learn how to read, and reading is the most important skill we can learn, because when we know how to read we can read the word of God for ourselves. And the same goes for all of us and the way that all of us spend our time and our resources.

**B. Others might be tempted to trade their souls for some kind of pleasure.**

And here again, the Bible is full of examples of people who made a decision to go in one of these two directions. We think about Moses in Hebrews 11:25 and how he chose, ***“...rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin....”*** Right there, the Bible just comes out and says it: Sin is pleasurable! Sin feels good! And yet the Bible also points out that the pleasure is ***“passing.”*** The pleasure of sin is only temporary. Moses, then, gave up being called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He could have lived a life of ease. He could have lived a life of pleasure, but he gave it up because of his commitment as a man of God. Today, though, many have exchanged their eternal souls for the passing pleasures of sin.

**C. We could also note that there is a danger in swapping our souls for so many of the various false teachings that we see around us.**

And this is a threat that goes back thousands of years. It was a danger in the Old Testament, and it was also a danger in the New Testament. We think of Paul’s warnings to the church in Colossae. In Colossians 2:8, Paul said, ***“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”*** He continued in verses 18-19, ***“Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”*** The false teachings change from year to year, but there is always a danger to swapping our souls for the latest perversion of God’s truth.

There are other swaps we could consider, but I hope we can see the danger of exchanging our souls for anything that this world has to offer. As the Lord said, even if we were to gain the whole world, there is no profit if we give up or lose our soul in the process.

**Conclusion:**

As we close our thoughts on this question of swapping our souls for something of lesser value, we look at this passage, and we see what the Lord was inviting us to do. He was telling us that we are to deny ourselves and take up our crosses and we are to follow Him. To deny ourselves means that we are to give up our own interests in favor of what the Lord would want us to do. To take up our cross means that we are to be prepared to die. We are to take steps heading down that road. As Paul said, we have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer we who live, but Christ lives in us. And then, to follow Jesus means that we are to follow his lead at all times. As Christians whose souls have been purchased by the blood of God’s Son, our souls are not really ours to trade. Our souls are not really ours to exchange. We have been bought with a price. And for this reason, as we live in a world that is increasingly hostile to the Christian faith, we are not to be ashamed. To some, some of what the Bible teaches is a little bit embarrassing. The Lord, though, tells us not to be ashamed, and that is where the Lord leaves it in verse 38.

As we make the decision concerning whether all of this is worth it, the Lord wants us to make the decision from an eternal point of view. Here in this life, right here in the middle of it, our perspective is not always very clear. Sometimes a nickel can look a lot more valuable than a dime. Our perspective can get distorted, so we need to rely on God who is in a much better position to tell us what is truly important. Several years ago, I went to go see a Brewers game with David Boone, and at that game there was a man in front of us who had had just a little too much to drink. Our seats were way out in left field, on the second tier, in a sea of more

than 40,000 people, more than 400 feet away from home plate, and this man in front of us was strongly (let's say) arguing with the officials over a pitch. Those of us around the man got a little laugh out of that. 400 feet away, after several drinks, and this man could make a better decision than the umpire, who was standing just a few feet behind home plate. Ridiculous! And yet when we choose this world over eternity, when we swap our souls for this world, don't we put ourselves in a similar situation? God, as our Creator, has told us about the value of the soul. He has warned us against the deceitfulness of wealth, and pleasure, and all kinds of false teachings, and he has given us a very clear choice. We now have the power to make that decision on our own – we can make the decision with our own limited vision (like the drunk in the stands), or we can put our faith in the One who is in a much better position to judge.

God sent his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. We accept his offer of salvation by turning away from sin and by allowing ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you have any questions, let us know. If you have something we need to pray about, write it down and bring it to the front. But if you are ready to obey the good news about Jesus right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)